



08-25-00



PATENT

Docket No. 1232-4640

Express Mail Label No. EL020890796US

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

UTILITY APPLICATION AND APPLICATION FEE TRANSMITTAL (1.53(b))

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS

Box Patent Application
Washington, D.C. 20231

Sir:

Transmitted herewith for filing is the patent application of

Named Inventor(s) and

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Kanagawa-ken, Japan

For:

AUTOFOCUS STROBE CONTROL IN IMAGE SENSING APPARATUS

Enclosed are:

☒ 35 page(s) of specification, 1 page(s) of Abstract, 8 Page(s) of claims

☒ 14 sheets of drawing ☒ formal ☐ informal

☐ Page(s) of Declaration and Power of Attorney

☐ Unsigned

☐ Newly Executed

☐ Copy from prior application

☐ Deletion of inventors including Signed Statement under 37 C.F.R. § 1.63(d)(2)

☒ Incorporation by Reference: The entire disclosure of the priority application(s) identified below, is considered as being part of the disclosure of the accompanying application and is incorporated herein by reference.

☐ Microfiche Computer Program (Appendix)

☐ page(s) of Sequence Listing

☐ computer readable disk containing Sequence Listing

☐ Statement under 37 C.F.R. § 1.821(f) that computer and paper copies of the Sequence Listing are the same

☒ Claim for Priority Japanese Application No 11-238188 filed 8/25/99 and 2000-246002 filed 8/14/00

☐ Certified copy of Priority Document(s)

- ☐ English translation documents
- ☐ Information Disclosure Statement
 - ☐ Copy of 1 Cited reference
 - ☐ Copy of PTO-1449 filed in parent application serial No. _____.
- ☐ Preliminary Amendment
- ☒ Return receipt postcard (MPEP 503)
- ☐ Assignment Papers (assignment cover sheet and assignment documents)
 - ☐ A check in the amount of \$40.00 for recording the Assignment.
 - ☐ Assignment papers filed in parent application Serial No. _____.
 - ☐ Certification of chain of title pursuant to 37 C.F.R. § 3.73(b).
- ☐ This is a ☐ continuation ☐ divisional ☐ continuation-in-part (C-I-P) of prior application serial no. _____.
- ☐ Cancel in this application original claims _____ of the parent application before calculating the filing fee. (At least one original independent claim must be retained for filing purposes.)
- ☐ A preliminary Amendment is enclosed. (Claims added by this Amendment have been properly numbered consecutively beginning with the number following the highest numbered original claim in the prior application.
- ☐ The status of the parent application is as follows:
 - ☐ A Petition For Extension of Time and a Fee therefor has been or is being filed in the parent application to extend the term for action in the parent application until _____.
 - ☐ A copy of the Petition for Extension of Time in the co-pending parent application is attached.
 - ☐ No Petition For Extension of Time and Fee therefor are necessary in the co-pending parent application.
- ☐ Please abandon the parent application at a time while the parent application is pending or at a time when the petition for extension of time in that application is granted and while this application is pending has been granted a filing date, so as to make this application co-pending.
 - ☐ Transfer the drawing(s) from the patent application to this application.
- ☐ Amend the specification by inserting before the first line the sentence:
This is a ☐ continuation ☐ divisional ☐ continuation-in-part of co-pending application Serial No. _____ filed _____.

I. CALCULATION OF APPLICATION FEE (For Other Than A Small Entity)

				Basic Fee	
	Number Filed		Number Extra	Rate	\$
Total					\$ 690.00
Claims	30	-20=	10	x\$18.00	\$ 180.00
Independent					
Claims	6	- 3=	3	x78.00	\$ 234.00
Multiple Dependent Claims					
	[] yes			Additional Fee =	
	[X] no			Add'l Fee = 260.00	NONE \$.0

Total: \$1,104.00

- [] A statement claiming small entity status is attached or has been filed in the above-identified parent application and its benefit under 37 C.F.R. § 1.28(a) is hereby claimed. Reduced fees under 37 C.F.R. § 1.9(F) (50% of total) paid herewith \$ _____.
- [X] A check in the amount of \$1,104.00 for payment of the application filing fees is attached.
- [] Charge Fee(s) to Deposit Account No. 13-4500. Order No. _____. A DUPLICATE COPY OF THIS SHEET IS ATTACHED.
- [X] The Assistant Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required for filing this application, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 13-4500, Order No. 1232-4640. A DUPLICATE COPY OF THIS SHEET IS ATTACHED.

Respectfully submitted,

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

Applicants : Hirofumi TAKEI
Serial No. : To Be Assigned Examiner: To Be Assigned
Filed : August 24, 2000 (Herewith) Group Art Unit: TBA
For : AUTOFOCUS STROBE CONTROL IN IMAGE SENSING APPARATUS

EXPRESS MAIL CERTIFICATE

Express Mail Label No. EL020890796US

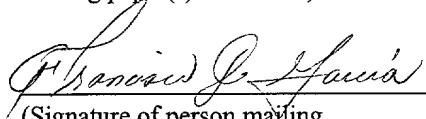
Date of Deposit August 24, 2000

I hereby certify that the following attached paper(s) and/or fee
Application Fee Transmittal (in duplicate); 35 pp. of specs., 1 page of abstract, 8 pp. claims (30 TOTAL
claims); 14 Sheets of Formal Drawings (Figs. 1-14); Check in the amount of \$1,104.00; and return receipt
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is being deposited with the United States Postal Service "Express Mail Post Office to Addressee" service under 37
C.F.R. §1.10 on the date indicated above and is addressed to the Assistant Commissioner for Patents, Box New
Applications, Washington, D.C. 20231.

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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

AUTOFOCUS STROBE CONTROL IN IMAGE SENSING APPARATUS

5

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to an image sensing
apparatus capable of effectively using a fill-in light
10 upon forming signals for focus control, a control method
of an image sensing apparatus, and a medium for
providing a control program for controlling an image
sensing apparatus.

15

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A video camera is one example of an image sensing
apparatus. In the field of video cameras, the recording
not only of moving pictures but of still pictures as
20 well has recently become a matter of much interest. A
video camera on which a strobe light can be mounted in
order to record a high-quality still picture on a
recording medium has been proposed. Such a video camera
provides a greater number of photographic opportunities.
25 Such strobe lights include one having a main-light
emission unit and a fill-in light emission unit for

actuating an autofocus function prior to photography.

In a strobe light of this kind, focusing is achieved by lighting the fill-in light emission unit and actuating the autofocus function, after which the main-light

5 emission unit is lit and the still picture stored on the storage medium.

The main technique used for implementing the autofocus function in an ordinary video camera is TVAF.

According to the TVAF technique, autofocusing is

10 performed by detecting the sharpness of an image using a video signal obtained as a result of photoelectrically converting the image of an optical subject by an image sensing device or the like, and controlling the position of a focusing lens so as to maximize the detected value.

15 In general, the degree of sharpness is evaluated using the level (referred to a "focus evaluation value" below) of the high-frequency components of a video signal that has been extracted by a bandpass filter having a certain pass band. Specifically, when an
20 ordinary subject image is photographed, the focus evaluation value increases with focusing, as illustrated in the characteristic diagram of Fig. 2. Accordingly, the point at which the focus evaluation value peaks is taken as being the in-focus position.

25 Control of the autofocus function in a video camera that is capable of still photography and possesses a

strobe light will be described on the basis of the flowchart shown in Fig. 12.

Step S901 is a preparatory step at which the fill-in light emission unit is lit and the autofocus function
5 acted. This is followed by step S902, at which the focusing lens is driven in very small increments and the focus evaluation value is detected. Next, on the basis of the focus evaluation value thus obtained at step S902, it is determined at step S903 whether the camera
10 is presently in focus as a result of finely driving the focusing lens.

If it is determined that the camera is not in the focused state, control proceeds to step S904. Here, in accordance with the result of finely driving the
15 focusing lens, it is determined in which direction the in-focus point is located (i.e., if the focusing lens should be moved toward the camera side or subject side from its present position to obtain the peak of the focus evaluation value). If the direction in which the
20 in-focus point is located cannot be determined, control returns to step S902. If the direction in which the in-focus point is located can be determined, control proceeds to step S905, at which an operation for moving the focusing lens in the determined direction is
25 executed. (This is referred to as a "hill-climbing operation" owing to the shape of the graph shown in Fig.

2.)

Next, at step S906, it is determined whether the position of the focusing lens has exceeded the in-focus point, i.e., whether it has exceeded the peak of the focus evaluation value. Control returns to step S905 if it is determined that the peak of the focus evaluation value has not been exceeded or proceeds to step S907 if it is determined that the peak of the focus evaluation value has been exceeded. Step S907 calls for the focusing lens to be moved back in the direction of peak of the focus evaluation value. It is then determined at step S908 whether the focus evaluation value has reached the peak. Control returns to step S907 if it is determined that the focus evaluation value has not reached the peak or to step S902 if it is determined that the focus evaluation value has reached the peak.

By executing the processing of steps S907 and S908, the focusing lens can be controlled so as to be moved to the position at which the focus evaluation value is maximized. However, since there are instances where the subject being photographed changes owing to panning or the like during the operation for returning the focusing lens to the position at which the focus evaluation value attains its peak, there are occasions where it cannot be ascertained whether this position is the true peak.

Accordingly, once the focus evaluation value has

arrived at the peak, processing returns to that from
step S902 onward and the operation for finely driving
the focusing lens is performed again in order to confirm
that the present focus evaluation value is the true
5 peak, i.e., to confirm that the camera is in the focused
state.

If it is determined at step S903 that the camera is
in the focused state, control proceeds to a still-
picture capture routine from step S909 onward.

10 Movement of the focusing lens is halted at step
S909, the fill-in light emission unit is turned off at
step S910 and the main-light emission unit is turned on
at step S911 to increase the illumination of the
subject, in which state the still picture is captured.
15 This processing is then exited.

The example of the prior art described above has
certain shortcomings.

Specifically, in view of problems relating to
durability and power consumption of the fill-in light
20 emission unit, keeping the fill-in light emission unit
lit over the entire period of the focusing operation is
undesirable. In actuality, therefore, the fill-in light
emission unit is turned on and off.

However, an AF (autofocus) evaluation value which
25 prevails when the fill-in light emission unit is on
differs from that which prevails when the fill-in light

emission unit is off. Therefore, autofocus control cannot be performed accurately if the fill-in light emission unit is turned on and off at a random timing.

Control of a fill-in light emission according to the prior art is synchronized to the vertical synchronizing signal of the video signal to turn on the fill-in light emission unit based upon the pulses of the vertical synchronizing signal, as proposed in the specification of Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open (KOKAI) No. 11-69224. Fig. 13 is a timing chart showing the timing at which the fill-in light emission unit is turned on and the charge accumulation timing of an image sensing device (CCD). As shown in Fig. 13, ON and OFF timings are synchronized to a vertical synchronizing signal and the duration of fill-in lighting is made a whole-number multiple of the vertical scanning interval (twice the vertical scanning interval in the example of Fig. 13). Fill-in light is emitted during this multiple of the vertical scanning interval. In the example depicted in Fig. 13, the fill-in light is turned off for one vertical scanning interval that follows the emission period. The focus evaluation values in respective ones of the three vertical scanning intervals are found, the values are averaged and the average value thus obtained is used as the focus evaluation value. If this is done, the average values of focus evaluation values obtained

at the timings of focus-evaluation-value averaging intervals a, b and c will be the same. This makes it possible to perform stable autofocus control.

In the example of the prior art described above,
5 the focus evaluation value of each vertical scanning interval can be obtained artificially by adding and averaging the focus evaluation values of a plurality (e.g., three) of successive vertical scanning intervals. However, the focus evaluation value thus obtained is a
10 focus evaluation value of a past vertical scanning interval, i.e., a focus evaluation value which contains information that is old in terms of time. It is difficult to perform real-time autofocus control using this focus evaluation value.

15 Further, at least one of the plurality (e.g., three) of successive vertical scanning intervals is a vertical scanning interval in which the fill-in light is off. As a consequence, even if autofocus control is carried out every vertical scanning interval using a
20 focus evaluation value obtained based solely upon a signal value acquired in each vertical scanning interval, a focus evaluation value obtained while the fill-in light is off will be unsuitable for use in autofocus control in a case where illumination of the
25 subject is inadequate. This places a limitation upon control and results in a troublesome operation.

Further, the fill-in light emission unit is turned on at the same timing regardless of whether drive is performed at a high shutter speed in which the charge accumulation period of the image sensing device is,

5 e.g., $1/250$ of a second or $1/1000$ of a second, or at an ordinary shutter speed in which the charge accumulation period of the image sensing device is $1/60$ of a second.

Fig. 14 is a diagram illustrating the charge accumulation timing of an ordinary image sensing device (CCD) driven at a high shutter speed of $1/250$ of a second, which shows CCD signal quantity and a vertical synchronizing signal.

As shown in Fig. 14, a signal that has accumulated over the first half of $1/60$ of a second, which is the drive cycle of one field, is dumped at a timing T_a . A
15 signal that has accumulated over a period of $1/250$ of a second, which extends from T_a to T_b , is then read out as an image signal. Thus, in a case where drive is performed at a high shutter speed, turning on the fill-
20 in light emission unit in a manner the same as that when drive is performed at the ordinary shutter speed of $1/60$ of a second means that the emission of light from the fill-in light emission unit up to T_a has no effect and is a wasteful light emission. Power is thus consumed
25 needlessly.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention has been devised in view of the problems set forth above and its object is to

5 provide an image sensing apparatus capable of effectively using a fill-in light upon forming signals for focus control, a control method of an image sensing apparatus, and a medium for providing a control program for controlling an image sensing apparatus.

10 According to the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing an image sensing apparatus comprising: an image sensing device that senses an optical image of an object and converting the optical image into an image signal to be used for
15 photographing; a signal forming device that forms a signal for focusing on the basis of the image signal obtained from the image sensing device; and a control device that emits light for assisting signal forming operation performed by the signal forming device and
20 changes emitting the light in correspondence with an image sensing period of the image sensing device when the signal forming device forms the signal for focusing.

According to the present invention, the foregoing object is also attained by providing an image sensing
25 apparatus comprising: an image sensing device that senses an optical image of an object and converting the

optical image into an image signal to be used for
photographing; a signal forming device that forms a
signal for focusing on the basis of the image signal
obtained from the image sensing device; and a control
5 device that repeatedly emits light for assisting signal
forming operation performed by the signal forming device
at a period of image sensing operation of the image
sensing device.

Furthermore, the foregoing object is also attained
10 by providing a control method of an image sensing
apparatus having: an image sensing device that senses an
optical image of an object and converting the optical
image into an image signal to be used for photographing;
and a signal forming device that forms a signal for
15 focusing on the basis of the image signal obtained from
the image sensing device, the method comprising the
steps of: emitting a light for assisting signal forming
operation performed by the signal forming device; and
changing emitting the light in correspondence with an
20 image sensing period of the image sensing device when
the signal forming device forms the signal for focusing.

Further, the foregoing object is also attained by
providing a control method of an image sensing apparatus
having: an image sensing device that senses an optical
25 image of an object and converting the optical image into
an image signal to be used for photographing; and a

signal forming device that forms a signal for focusing on the basis of the image signal obtained from the image sensing device, the method comprising the step of:

repeatedly emitting a light for assisting signal forming

- 5 operation performed by the signal forming device at a period of image sensing operation of the image sensing device.

- Further, the foregoing object is also attained by providing a medium for providing a control program of an
- 10 image sensing apparatus having: an image sensing device that senses an optical image of an object and converting the optical image into an image signal to be used for photographing; and a signal forming device that forms a signal for focusing on the basis of the image signal
- 15 obtained from the image sensing device, wherein the program emits a light for assisting signal forming operation performed by the signal forming device and changes emitting the light in correspondence with an image sensing period of the image sensing device when
- 20 the signal forming device forms the signal for focusing.

- Further, the foregoing object is also attained by providing a medium for providing a control program of an image sensing apparatus having: an image sensing device that senses an optical image of an object and converting
- 25 the optical image into an image signal to be used for photographing; and a signal forming device that forms a

signal for focusing on the basis of the image signal
obtained from the image sensing device, wherein the
program repeatedly emits a light for assisting signal
forming operation performed by signal forming device at
5 a period of image sensing operation of the image sensing
device.

Other features and advantages of the present
invention will be apparent from the following
description taken in conjunction with the accompanying
10 drawings, in which like reference characters designate
the same or similar parts throughout the figures
thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated
in and constitute a part of the specification,
illustrate an embodiment of the invention and, together
with the description, serve to explain the principles of
20 the invention.

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating the
construction of an image sensing apparatus according to
an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a diagram useful in describing a focus
25 evaluation value in the image sensing apparatus
according to this embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a flowchart illustrating the flow of an autofocus control operation in the image sensing apparatus according to this embodiment of the present invention;

5 Fig. 4 is a flowchart illustrating the flow of an operation for controlling a fill-in light emission unit in the image sensing apparatus according to this embodiment of the present invention;

10 Fig. 5 is a diagram illustrating the relationship between charge accumulation period and ON time of the fill-in light emission unit in the image sensing apparatus according to this embodiment of the present invention;

15 Fig. 6 is a diagram illustrating the relationship between charge accumulation period and OFF time of the fill-in light emission unit in the image sensing apparatus according to this embodiment of the present invention;

20 Fig. 7 is a diagram illustrating light-emission timing of the fill-in light emission unit at an ordinary shutter speed (1/60 of a second) in the image sensing apparatus according to this embodiment of the present invention;

25 Fig. 8 is a diagram illustrating light-emission timing of a fill-in light emission unit at an ordinary

shutter speed (1/60 of a second) in an image sensing apparatus according to the prior art;

Fig. 9 is a diagram illustrating light-emission timing of the fill-in light emission unit at a high shutter speed (1/250 of a second) in the image sensing apparatus according to this embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 10 is a diagram illustrating light-emission timing of the fill-in light emission unit at a high shutter speed (1/250 of a second) in the image sensing apparatus according to the prior art;

Fig. 11 is a graph illustrating how the relationship between the charge accumulation period and video signal level according to the present invention differs from that according to the prior art;

Fig. 12 is a flowchart illustrating the flow of an autofocus control operation in the image sensing apparatus according to the prior art;

Fig. 13 is a diagram illustrating the lighting scheme of a fill-in light emission unit according to the prior art; and

Fig. 14 is a diagram illustrating read-out timing of a CCD at the time of a high shutter speed in the image sensing apparatus according to the prior art.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A preferred embodiment of the present invention will be described in detail in accordance with the accompanying drawings.

5 Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of a video camera exemplifying an image sensing apparatus according to this embodiment. As shown in Fig. 1, the video camera includes a stationary first lens group 101; a zoom lens 102 for zooming; an
10 iris 103 for adjusting amount of light; a stationary second lens group 104; and a focusing lens 105 having a function for correcting movement of the focal plane that accompanies zooming and a focusing function.

 The video camera further includes a CCD 106 as an
15 image sensing device for sensing an optical image of an object and converting the optical image into image signals to be recorded; a CDS/AGC 107 for sampling, holding and amplifying the output of the CCD 106, with the amplification factor thereof being adjusted by a
20 signal from a camera controller (microcomputer) 114, described later; an A/D converter 108 for converting an analog signal from the CDS/AGC 107 to a digital signal; a camera signal processing circuit 109 the output signal of which is recorded on a recording medium such as
25 magnetic tape or memory (i.e., recording of an image is achieved by this operation); and a timing signal

generator 110 for supplying various drive pulses and timing pulses to the CCD 106, CDS/AGC 107 and other components of the video camera. In accordance with control data from the camera controller 114, the timing
5 signal generator 110 controls the driving of the CCD 106 in such a manner that the charge accumulation time of the CCD 106 can be controlled at will from drive at an ordinary shutter speed of 1/60 of a second, which is the ordinary NTSC charge accumulation time, to drive at a
10 high shutter speed where the charge accumulation time is a short 1/1000 of a second.

The video camera further includes a zoom lens driver 111 for driving the zoom lens 102; an iris driver 112 for driving the iris 103; and a focusing lens driver
15 113 for driving the focusing lens 105. Motors contained within the drivers 111, 112 and 113 are driven by signals from the camera controller 114. The latter controls the overall operation of the video camera, controls the focusing lens 105 based upon an output
20 signal from a focus evaluation value processing unit 115, described later, and controls the iris 103 and CDS/AGC 107 based upon an output signal from an exposure evaluation value processing unit 116, described later. The focus evaluation value processing unit 115 extracts
25 high-frequency components, which are used in focus detection, from a luminance signal output from the A/D

converter 108. The focus evaluation value output from the focus evaluation value processing unit 115 enters the camera controller 114, which proceeds to drive the focusing lens 105 via the focusing lens driver 113 in
5 such a manner that the focus evaluation value is maximized.

The luminance signal output from the A/D converter 108 is input to the exposure evaluation value processing unit 116. The latter generates an exposure evaluation
10 value, which controls exposure, from an image signal and inputs the exposure evaluation value to the camera controller 114. The latter then controls the diaphragm 103 on the basis of the exposure evaluation value so as to obtain the optimum amount of exposure. A key unit
15 117, which is connected to the camera controller 114, outputs information indicative of the operation of various keys to the camera controller 114. A strobe light 120, which is for increasing the illumination of the subject, has a main-light emission unit 121 and a
20 fill-in light emission unit 122.

In the video camera according to this embodiment constructed as illustrated in Fig. 1, the camera controller 114 performs autofocus by moving the focusing lens 105 in such a manner that the output
25 signal level of the focus evaluation value processing unit 115 is maximized.

The control operation of the camera controller 114 in the video camera according to this embodiment will now be described with reference to the flowchart of Fig. 3. The processing shown in Fig. 3 is executed within
5 the camera controller 114 (by a microcomputer, for example).

Step S301, which is the first step in Fig. 3, calls for the fill-in light emission unit 122 to be
10 synchronized to the vertical scanning intervals so that the light-emission time thereof is controlled in dependence upon the charge accumulation period of the image sensing device 106. (This causes the fill-in light emission unit 122 to be turned on and off
synchronously.) The details of the processing at step
15 S301 will be described later with reference to Fig. 4. Next, at step S302, the focusing lens 105 is driven through small increments and the focus evaluation value is read in. Next, on the basis of the focus evaluation value thus obtained at step S302, it is determined at
20 step S303 whether the camera is presently in focus as a result of finely driving the focusing lens.

If it is determined that the camera is not in the focused state, control proceeds to step S304. Here, in accordance with the result of finely driving the
25 focusing lens 105, it is determined in which direction the in-focus point is located (i.e., if the focusing

lens 105 should be moved toward the camera side or subject side from its present position to obtain the peak of the focus evaluation value). If the direction in which the in-focus point is located cannot be
5 determined, control returns to step S302. If the direction in which the in-focus point is located can be determined, control proceeds to step S305, at which an operation for moving the focusing lens 105 in the determined direction is executed. (This is referred to
10 as a "hill-climbing operation" owing to the shape of the graph shown in Fig. 2.)

Next, at step S306, it is determined whether the position of the focusing lens 105 has exceeded the in-focus point, i.e., whether it has exceeded the peak of
15 the focus evaluation value. Control returns to step S305 if it is determined that the peak of the focus evaluation value has not been exceeded or proceeds to step S307 if it is determined that the peak of the focus evaluation value has been exceeded. Step S307 calls for
20 the focusing lens to be moved back in the direction of peak of the focus evaluation value. It is then determined at step S308 whether the focus evaluation value has reached the peak. Control returns to step S307 if it is determined that the focus evaluation value
25 has not reached the peak or to step S302 if it is determined that the focus evaluation value has reached

the peak.

By executing the processing of steps S307 and S308, the focusing lens 105 can be controlled so as to be moved to the position at which the focus evaluation value is maximized. However, since there are instances where the subject being photographed changes owing to panning or the like during the operation for returning the focusing lens 105 to the position at which the focus evaluation value attains its peak, there are occasions where it cannot be ascertained whether this position is the true peak.

Accordingly, once the focus evaluation value has arrived at the peak, processing returns to that from step S302 onward and the operation for finely driving the focusing lens is performed again in order to confirm that the present focus evaluation value is the true peak, i.e., to confirm that the camera is in the focused state.

If it is determined at step S303 that the camera is in the focused state, control proceeds to a still-picture capture routine from step S309 onward.

Movement of the focusing lens 105 is halted at step S309, the fill-in light emission unit 122 is turned off at step S310 and the main-light emission unit 121 is lit at step S311 to increase the illumination of the subject, in which state the still picture is captured.

This processing is then exited.

In the case of the video camera serving as the image sensing apparatus according to this embodiment, the method of lighting the fill-in light emission unit
5 122 when the fill-in light emission unit 122 is turned on and off at step S301 has the characterizing features set forth below.

Fig. 4 is a flowchart illustrating the flow of processing executed at step S301 in Fig. 3.

10 At step S401 in Fig. 4, the camera controller 114 reads in the charge accumulation period (shutter speed) T_s at which the image sensing device 106 is being driven via the timing signal generator 110. Next, at step S402, ON time T_{on} of the fill-in light emission unit 122
15 is calculated from the charge accumulation period T_s read in at step S401.

Fig. 5 is a diagram showing an example of the relationship between the charge accumulation period T_s and ON time T_{on} of the fill-in light emission unit 122.
20 Here ON time T_{on} (sec) and charge accumulation period T_s (sec) are plotted along the vertical and horizontal axes, respectively.

As shown in Fig. 5, the charge accumulation period T_s and the ON time T_{on} of the fill-in light emission
25 unit 122 are proportionally related if the charge accumulation period T_s is less than 1/100 of a second.

Further, the characteristic is such that the ON time T_{on} is clamped at $1/100$ of a second even if the charge accumulation period T_s is equal to or greater than $1/100$ of a second. This is to prevent the fill-in light

5 emission unit from being lit continuously. By adopting this expedient, OFF time of $(T_s - 1/100)$ seconds is always provided even if the charge accumulation period T_s exceeds $1/100$ of a second. This makes it possible to improve the durability of the fill-in light emission
10 unit. The ON time T_{on} of the fill-in light emission unit 122 is found from the charge accumulation period T_s on the basis of this relationship.

Next, at step S403 in Fig. 4, OFF time T_{off} of the fill-in light emission unit 122 is calculated. In the
15 case of the NTSC system, the charge accumulation period of one field is $1/60$ of a second, and therefore the OFF time T_{off} of the fill-in light emission unit 122 is equal to $(1/60 - T_{on})$ seconds.

Fig. 6 is a diagram illustrating an example of the
20 relationship between the ON time T_{on} and OFF time T_{off} of the fill-in light emission unit 122. Here OFF time T_{off} (sec) and ON time T_{on} (sec) are plotted along the vertical and horizontal axes, respectively.

Next, at step S404, the data representing the ON
25 time T_{on} and OFF time T_{off} of the fill-in light emission unit 122 obtained at steps S402 and S403, respectively,

is set in a timer of the microcomputer within the camera controller 114, after which this processing is exited. The microcomputer within the camera controller 114 is synchronized to the vertical scanning interval (1/60 of a second in the NTSC system) of the video signal by the value set in the timer, executes interrupt processing in accordance with the timer in this vertical scanning interval and manages the ON time and OFF time of the fill-in light emission unit 122.

10 Fig. 7 is a diagram illustrating lighting timing of the fill-in light emission unit 122 when the charge accumulation period is 1/60 of a second. Fig. 7 shows the signal quantity of the CCD 106, the signal for controlling the fill-in light emission unit 122 and the
15 vertical synchronizing signal.

 Fig. 9 is a diagram illustrating lighting timing of the fill-in light emission unit 122 of this embodiment when the charge accumulation period is 1/250 of a second. Fig. 9 shows the signal quantity of the CCD
20 106, the signal for controlling the fill-in light emission unit 122 and the vertical synchronizing signal.

 For purposes of comparison, lighting timing of the fill-in light emission unit and charge accumulation timing of the image sensing device in the prior art in a
25 case where the charge accumulation time of the image sensing device is 1/60 of a second and in a case where

the charge accumulation time is 1/250 of a second are illustrated in Figs. 8 and 10, respectively. Figs. 8 and 10 show the signal quantity of the image sensing device (CCD), the average values of signal quantities
5 obtained in respective ones of three vertical scanning intervals, the signal for controlling the fill-in light emission unit and the vertical synchronizing signal.

The difference between the present invention and the prior art will be described with reference to Figs.
10 7 to 11. It should be noted that Figs. 7 to 11 illustrate a case where it is assumed that the object photographed is the same and is illuminated by a light source other than fill-in light.

In the conventional method of turning the fill-in light emission unit on and off, a focus evaluation value
15 conforming to the signal quantity S_b is obtained twice in the three vertical scanning intervals, but in one of the vertical scanning intervals, the signal quantity is low, as illustrated in Fig. 8. As a consequence, even
20 if autofocus control is performed in every vertical scanning interval using focus evaluation values obtained on the basis solely of a signal value obtained in each vertical scanning interval, it is inappropriate to use, in autofocus control, a focus evaluation value obtained
25 when the fill-in light emission unit is off if the illumination of the subject is inadequate. This places

a limitation upon control and results in a troublesome operation.

By contrast, with the method of turning the fill-in light emission unit on and off according to the present invention, as shown in Fig. 7, a focus evaluation value that corresponds to the signal quantity S_a can be acquired in every vertical scanning interval. As a result, autofocus control can be carried out irrespective of illumination of the subject.

Next, the conventional case where use is made of average values of focus evaluation values in three vertical scanning intervals and the present invention will be compared and described.

In the case where the focus evaluation values of, e.g., three successive vertical scanning intervals are added and averaged according to the prior art to artificially obtain a focus evaluation value in each vertical scanning interval, the same focus evaluation values can be obtained in any combination of vertical scanning intervals a, b and c of Fig. 13 even through focus evaluation values are averaged. However, focus evaluation values thus obtained are focus evaluation values of past vertical scanning intervals, i.e., focus evaluation values which contain information that is old in terms of time. It is difficult to perform real-time autofocus control using these focus evaluation values.

Moreover, generally the focus evaluation value declines with a decrease in charge accumulation time brought on by an increase in shutter speed. With the conventional method of turning on the fill-in light emission unit,

5 however, a problem which arises is that the focus evaluation value declines by more than the decline in charge accumulation time.

Fig. 8 shows average-value calculation of signals in three vertical scanning intervals according to the prior art. If the ON time T_{on} according to the present invention is assumed to be the longest ON time and the duty ratio of the ON time T_{on} to the OFF time T_{off} is assumed to be the same as that of the prior art (3:1), then the signal quantity S_a shown in Fig. 7 will be a fill-in light emission time that is two-thirds of the vertical scanning interval during which the fill-in light is on in the example of the prior art shown in Fig. 8. The magnitude of the signal quantity S_a , therefore, is related to that of the signal quantity S_b as follows:

$$S_a = S_b \times 2/3 \quad (\text{Eq. 1})$$

As indicated by Equation (1), the signal quantity S_b in a vertical scanning interval during which the fill-in light is on in the example of the prior art is an output value that is 1.5 times larger than that of the signal quantity S_a in Fig. 7. However, since the output value

in a vertical scanning interval during which the fill-in light is extinguished is low (assumed to be zero in order to simplify the description), the average value Sb_{avr} of the signal quantity over three vertical

5 scanning intervals is as follows when calculated:

$$Sb_{avr} = (Sb \times 2)/3 \quad (Eq. 2)$$

Since $Sb = Sa \times 3/2$ holds in view of Equation (1), we have

$$Sb_{avr} = (Sa \times 3/2 \times 2)/3 = Sa \quad (Eq. 3)$$

10 and it will be understood that Sa and Sb_{avr} are equal in size.

In other words, in the example of the prior art, the image sensing device outputs the signal quantity Sb , which is larger than the signal quantity Sa of the present invention. However, when averaging is performed in the number of vertical scanning intervals in the period during which the fill-in light is on, the value Sb_{avr} of the focus evaluation values used in autofocus control becomes smaller than the value of the signal quantity Sb .

20 At $1/60$ of a second, the signal value obtained with the present invention and the average value of the signal quantity in the example of the prior art are equal. However, when the shutter speed is raised to

thereby shorten the charge accumulation period, the signal value obtained with the prior art is smaller than that obtained with the present invention.

Next, as an example in which the shutter speed is made greater than 1/60 of a second, a further difference between the example of the prior art and the present invention in a case where the charge accumulation period is 1/250 of a second will be described with reference to Figs. 9 and 10.

In control shown in Fig. 10, charge is accumulated at a shutter speed of 1/250 of a second. Accordingly, a signal that has accumulated over a period of time from the vertical synchronizing signal to T_a is dumped at the timing of T_a . This means that the emission of fill-in light up to T_a is wasted.

By contrast, with the method of turning on the fill-in light emission unit according to the present invention shown in Fig. 9, the light emission is controlled in sync with the charge accumulation period of the image sensing device. Up to the signal dump timing T_a , therefore, the fill-in light is off, as shown in Fig. 9. This means that the wasteful emission of light that occurs in the prior art can be prevented.

Further, since the signal quantity S_d obtained in a vertical scanning interval during which the fill-in light is on is a signal that has accumulated from T_a to

Tb, as shown in Fig. 10, this a value identical with that of the signal quantity Sc shown in Fig. 9.

Accordingly, we have

$$S_c = S_d \quad (\text{Eq. 4})$$

5 If the average value Sd_avr of three vertical scanning intervals shown in Fig. 10 is calculated, the output value in a vertical scanning interval in which the fill-in light is off declines (is assumed to become zero in order to simplify the description). Accordingly, we

10 have the following:

$$S_{d_avr} = (S_d \times 2) / 3 \quad (\text{Eq. 5})$$

Since $S_d = S_c$ holds in view of Equation (4), we have

$$S_{d_avr} = S_c \times 2/3 \quad (\text{Eq. 6})$$

Thus the average value Sd of signal quantity for the
15 focus evaluation value used in autofocus control becomes two-thirds of the signal quantity Sc obtained with the present invention, as indicated by Equation (6).

Fig. 11 is a graph illustrating the difference between charge accumulation period and video signal
20 level according to the fill-in lighting methods of the present invention and prior art. The bold solid line in Fig. 11 indicates a value representing the signal quantity according to the present invention, and the fine solid line indicates the average value of signal
25 quantity according to the example of the prior art. If,

in a case where the duty cycle of fill-in ON time according to the prior art is $2/3$, the ratio of charge accumulation period to one vertical scanning interval is greater than $2:3$, then the average value of signal
5 quantity obtained with the example of the prior art becomes two-thirds of the signal quantity obtained every vertical scanning interval in accordance with the present invention and the focus evaluation value also becomes two-thirds of that according to the invention,
10 as illustrated in Fig. 11.

Thus, with the method of adding and averaging focus evaluation values in vertical scanning intervals in a period in which the fill-in light is on in the example of the prior art, the focus evaluation value declines by
15 more than the decline in charge accumulation time. In accordance with the present invention, however, as described above, it becomes possible to obtain a focus evaluation value, which is proportional to the charge accumulation period, that is larger than that of the
20 example of the prior art. As a result, the performance of autofocus control can be improved over that of the prior art.

In accordance with this embodiment, as described above, the emission of light from the fill-in light
25 emission unit 122 is synchronized to the vertical scanning interval ($1/60$ of a second in the NTSC system),

and the ON time of the fill-in light emission unit 122 is controlled in dependence upon the charge accumulation period, thereby making it possible to improve the efficiency of light emission by a wide margin. Further, since an effective focus evaluation value can be obtained in every vertical scanning interval, it is possible to carry out autofocus control using all of the focus evaluation values in each of the vertical scanning intervals, unlike fill-in lighting control according to the prior art. In addition, since the emission of fill-in light is performed in sync with intervals in which the video signal is accumulated in dependence upon the shutter speed of the image sensing device, an image signal larger than that of the prior-art system can be obtained even if the charge accumulation period is shortened by raising shutter speed. This improves the performance of autofocus control at the time of high shutter speeds.

Further, the arrangement is such that a fill-in light OFF period greater than a certain predetermined period of time is provided regardless of the charge accumulation period. As a result, the durability of the fill-in light emission unit 122 is enhanced and power consumption is reduced.

<Other Embodiment>

The present invention can be applied to a system

constituted by a plurality of devices (e.g., a host computer, interface and camera head, etc.) or to an apparatus comprising a single device (e.g., a video camera).

5 Furthermore, the object of the invention can also be attained also by supplying a storage medium storing program codes for performing the aforesaid processes to a computer system or apparatus (e.g., a personal computer), reading the program codes by a CPU or MPU of
10 the computer system or apparatus from the storage medium, and then executing the program.

 In this case, the program codes read from the storage medium implement the functions of the embodiment and the storage medium storing the program codes
15 constitutes the invention.

 Examples of storage media that can be used for supplying the program code are a floppy disk, hard disk, optical disk, magneto-optical disk, CD-ROM, CD-R, magnetic tape, non-volatile type memory card or ROM,
20 etc.

 Furthermore, besides the case where the aforesaid functions according to the embodiment are implemented by executing the program codes read by a computer, the present invention covers a case where an operating
25 system or the like running on the computer performs a part of or the entire process in accordance with the

designation of program codes and implements the functions according to the above embodiment.

The present invention further covers a case where, after the program codes read from the storage medium are written in a function expansion card inserted into the computer or in a memory provided in a function expansion unit connected to the computer, a CPU or the like contained in the function expansion card or function expansion unit performs a part of or the entire process in accordance with the designation of program codes and implements the functions of the above embodiment.

In a case where the present invention is applied to the aforesaid storage medium, the storage medium stores program codes corresponding to the flowcharts 3 and 4 and data described in the embodiment.

The above is the explanation of the embodiments of the present invention; however, the present invention is not limited to the embodiments and can be applied to anything as long as functions of the configuration disclosed in the claims or functions of the configuration disclosed in the embodiments are achieved.

For instance, an emission period of a fill-in light is changed in accordance with an accumulation period of the image sensing device in the above embodiments, however, other operation of the fill-in light, such as the intensity of fill-in light, may be changed.

Further, a signal used in focus control is formed by detecting sharpness of an image in the above embodiments, however, the present invention is also applicable to a case where a signal used in focus control is formed in another method.

Furthermore, the hardware configuration and the software configuration of the above embodiments can be properly interchanged each other.

It should be noted that the present invention includes combinations of the aforesaid embodiments or technical elements disclosed therein.

Further, the present invention also includes an apparatus, formed by all or a part of the configuration disclosed in the claims or embodiments of the present invention, which can be used either individually, with another apparatus, or within another apparatus.

Further, the present invention is applicable to: various types of cameras, such as an electronic camera for sensing a moving and/or a still image, a camera using a silver-halide film, a lens-exchangeable camera, a single-lens reflex camera, a leaf shutter camera, and a monitor camera; an image sensing apparatus other than cameras; an optical apparatus; and the like; an apparatus applied to cameras, an image sensing apparatus, an optical apparatus, and the like; control method of the foregoing apparatuses; and a computer

program product for providing the control method.

The present invention is not limited to the above
embodiments and various changes and modifications can be
made within the spirit and scope of the present

5 invention. Therefore, to apprise the public of the
scope of the present invention, the following claims are
made.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An image sensing apparatus comprising:
an image sensing device that senses an optical
5 image of an object and converting the optical image into
an image signal to be used for photographing;
a signal forming device that forms a signal for
focusing on the basis of the image signal obtained from
said image sensing device; and
10 a control device that emits light for assisting
signal forming operation performed by said signal
forming device and changes emitting the light in
correspondence with an image sensing period of said
image sensing device when said signal forming device
15 forms the signal for focusing.
2. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
1, wherein the image sensing period of said image
sensing means is an image sensing period for the image
20 signal to be used for photographing.
3. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
1, wherein said control device emits the light in
synchronization with image sensing operation of said
25 image sensing device.

4. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said control device repeatedly emits the light at a period of image sensing operation of said image sensing device.

5

5. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said period corresponds to a vertical scanning period.

10

6. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said period corresponds to a period of a vertical synchronizing signal.

15

7. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said control device does not emit the light for a predetermined period at the period of the image sensing operation of said image sensing device.

20

8. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said control device does not emit the light at least for a predetermined period at the period of the image sensing operation of said image sensing device.

25

9. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said control device changes light-emission time of the light in accordance with the image sensing

period of said image sensing device.

10. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
9, wherein said control device increases the light-
5 emission time of the light as the image sensing period
of said image sensing device increases.

11. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
9, wherein said control device fixes the light-emission
10 time of the light to a predetermined period in a case
where the image sensing period of said image sensing
device exceeds a predetermined period.

12. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
15 1, wherein said control device changes light-emission
intensity of the light in accordance with the image
sensing period of said image sensing device.

13. An image sensing apparatus comprising:
20 an image sensing device that senses an optical
image of an object and converting the optical image into
an image signal to be used for photographing;
a signal forming device that forms a signal for
focusing on the basis of the image signal obtained from
25 said image sensing device; and
a control device that repeatedly emits light for

assisting signal forming operation performed by said
signal forming device at a period of image sensing
operation of said image sensing device.

5 14. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
13, wherein the image sensing period of said image
sensing device is an image sensing period for the image
signal to be used for photographing.

10 15. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
13, wherein said control device emits the light in
synchronization with image sensing operation of said
image sensing device.

15 16. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
13, wherein said control device repeatedly emits the
light at a period of image sensing operation of said
image sensing device corresponding to a vertical
scanning period.

20 17. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
13, wherein said control device repeatedly emits the
light at a period of image sensing operation of said
image sensing device corresponding to a period of a
25 vertical synchronizing signal.

18. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said control device does not emit the light for a predetermined period at the period of image sensing operation by said image sensing device.

5

19. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said control device does not emit the light at least for a predetermined period at the period of image sensing operation of said image sensing device.

10

20. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said control device changes emitting the light in correspondence with an image sensing period of said image sensing device when said signal forming device forms the signal for focusing.

15

21. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 20, wherein said control device changes light-emission time of the light in accordance with the image sensing period of said image sensing device.

20

22. The image sensing apparatus according to claim 21, wherein said control device increases the light-emission time of the light as the image sensing period of said image sensing device increases.

25

23. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
21, wherein said control device fixes the light-emission
time of the light to a predetermined period in a case
where the image sensing period of said image sensing
5 device exceeds a predetermined period.

24. The image sensing apparatus according to claim
20, wherein said control device changes light-emission
intensity of the light in accordance with the image
10 sensing period of said image sensing device.

25. A control method of an image sensing apparatus
having: an image sensing device that senses an optical
image of an object and converting the optical image into
15 an image signal to be used for photographing; and a
signal forming device that forms a signal for focusing
on the basis of the image signal obtained from said
image sensing device, said method comprising the steps
of:

20 emitting a light for assisting signal forming
operation performed by said signal forming device; and
changing emitting the light in correspondence with
an image sensing period of said image sensing device
when said signal forming device forms the signal for
25 focusing.

26. A control method of an image sensing apparatus having: an image sensing device that senses an optical image of an object and converting the optical image into an image signal to be used for photographing; and a
5 signal forming device that forms a signal for focusing on the basis of the image signal obtained from said image sensing device, said method comprising the step of:

repeatedly emitting a light for assisting signal
10 forming operation performed by said signal forming device at a period of image sensing operation of said image sensing device.

27. A medium for providing a control program of an
15 image sensing apparatus having: an image sensing device that senses an optical image of an object and converting the optical image into an image signal to be used for photographing; and a signal forming device that forms a signal for focusing on the basis of the image signal
20 obtained from said image sensing device,

wherein said program emits a light for assisting signal forming operation performed by said signal forming device and changes emitting the light in correspondence with an image sensing period of said
25 image sensing device when said signal forming device forms the signal for focusing.

28. The medium according to claim 27, wherein the medium is a storage medium.

5 29. A medium for providing a control program of an image sensing apparatus having: an image sensing device that senses an optical image of an object and converting the optical image into an image signal to be used for photographing; and a signal forming device that forms a
10 signal for focusing on the basis of the image signal obtained from said image sensing device,

 wherein said program repeatedly emits a light for assisting signal forming operation performed by said signal forming device at a period of image sensing
15 operation of said image sensing device.

30. The medium according to claim 29, wherein the medium is a storage medium.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

Provided is control relating to autofocusing in an image sensing apparatus having an image sensing unit for photoelectrically converting an optical image of a subject to obtain an image signal representing the subject, and an autofocus function, the apparatus being capable of performing photography using a fill-in light emission unit. Control includes setting a charge accumulation period of the image sensing unit, deciding light-emission time of the fill-in light emission unit based upon the charge accumulation period that has been set, performing control in such a manner that the fill-in light emission unit is caused to emit light for the decided light-emission time in sync with start of the charge accumulation period, and performing focusing control based upon the image signal obtained from the image sensing unit. Control of the fill-in light emission unit is executed repeatedly during control of focusing.

FIG. 1

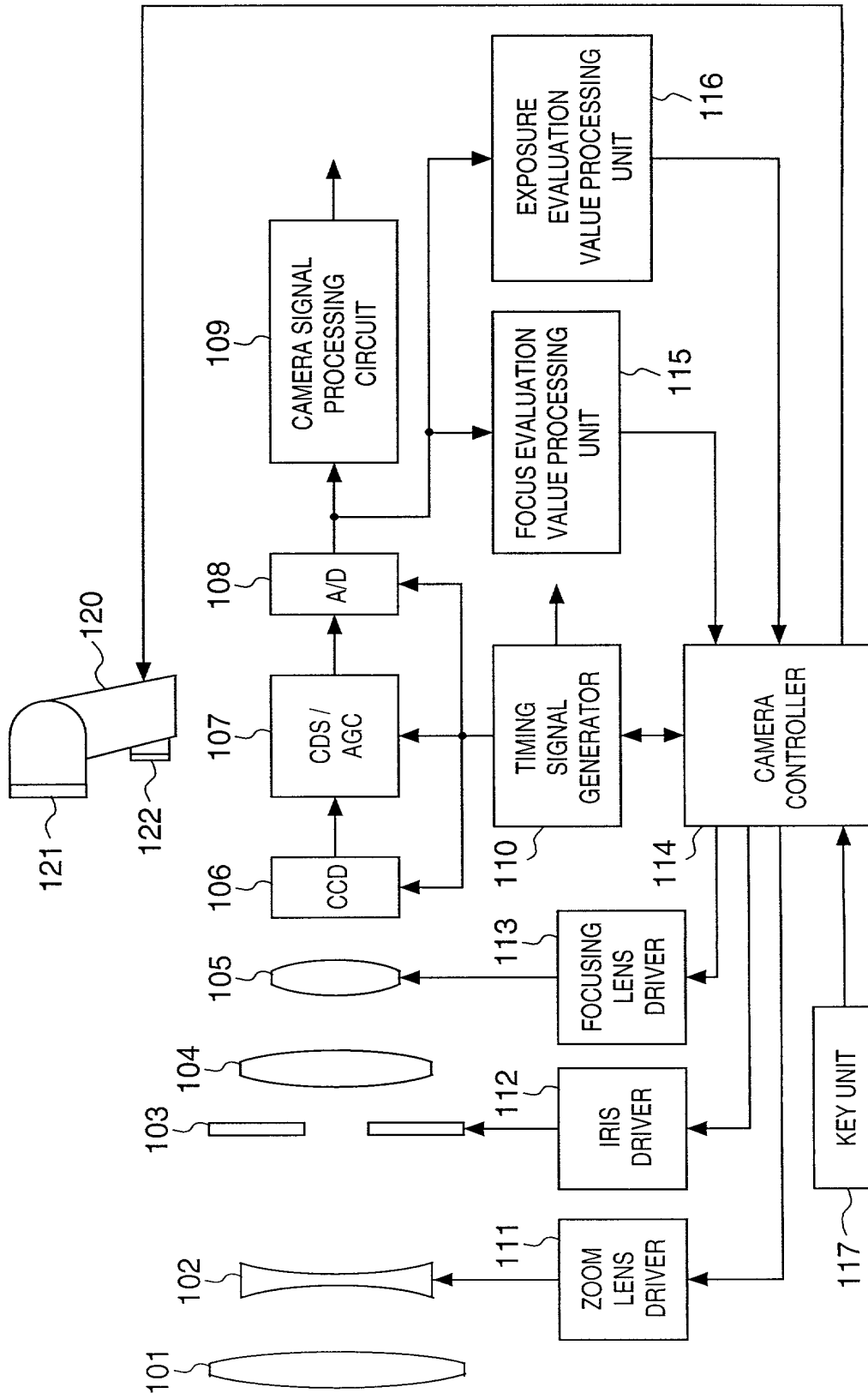


FIG. 2

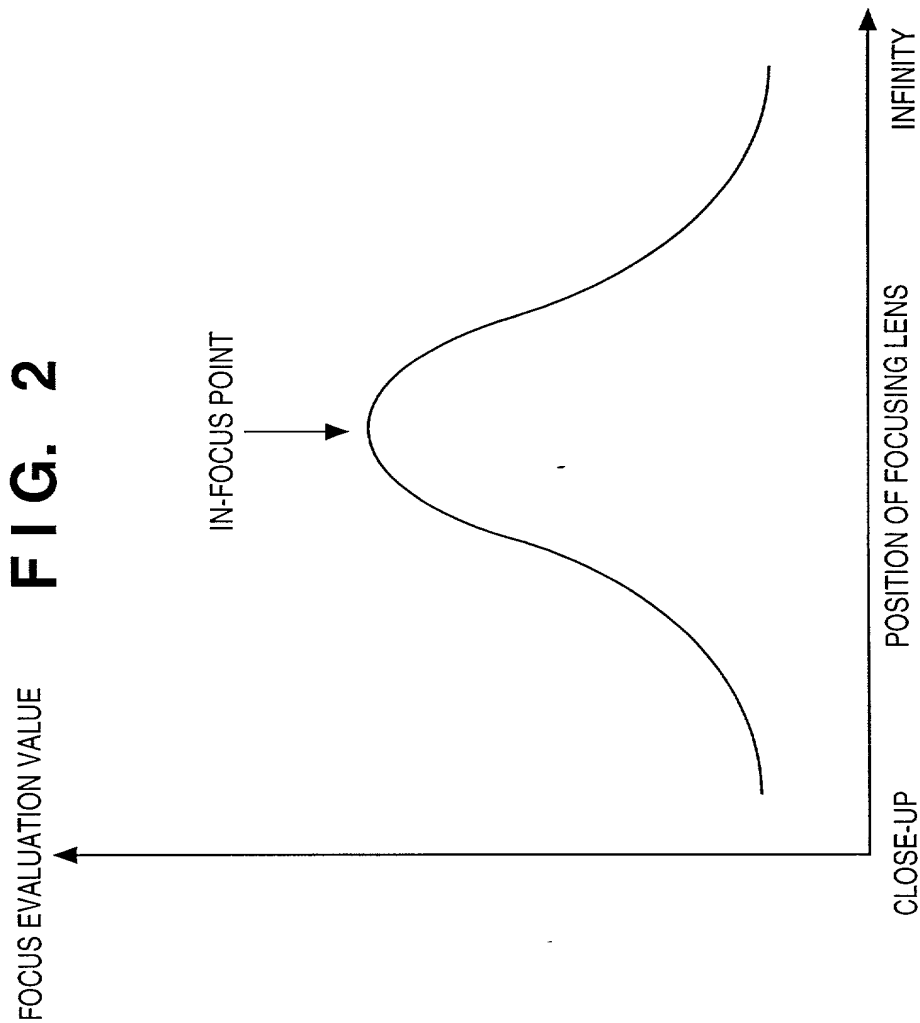


FIG. 3

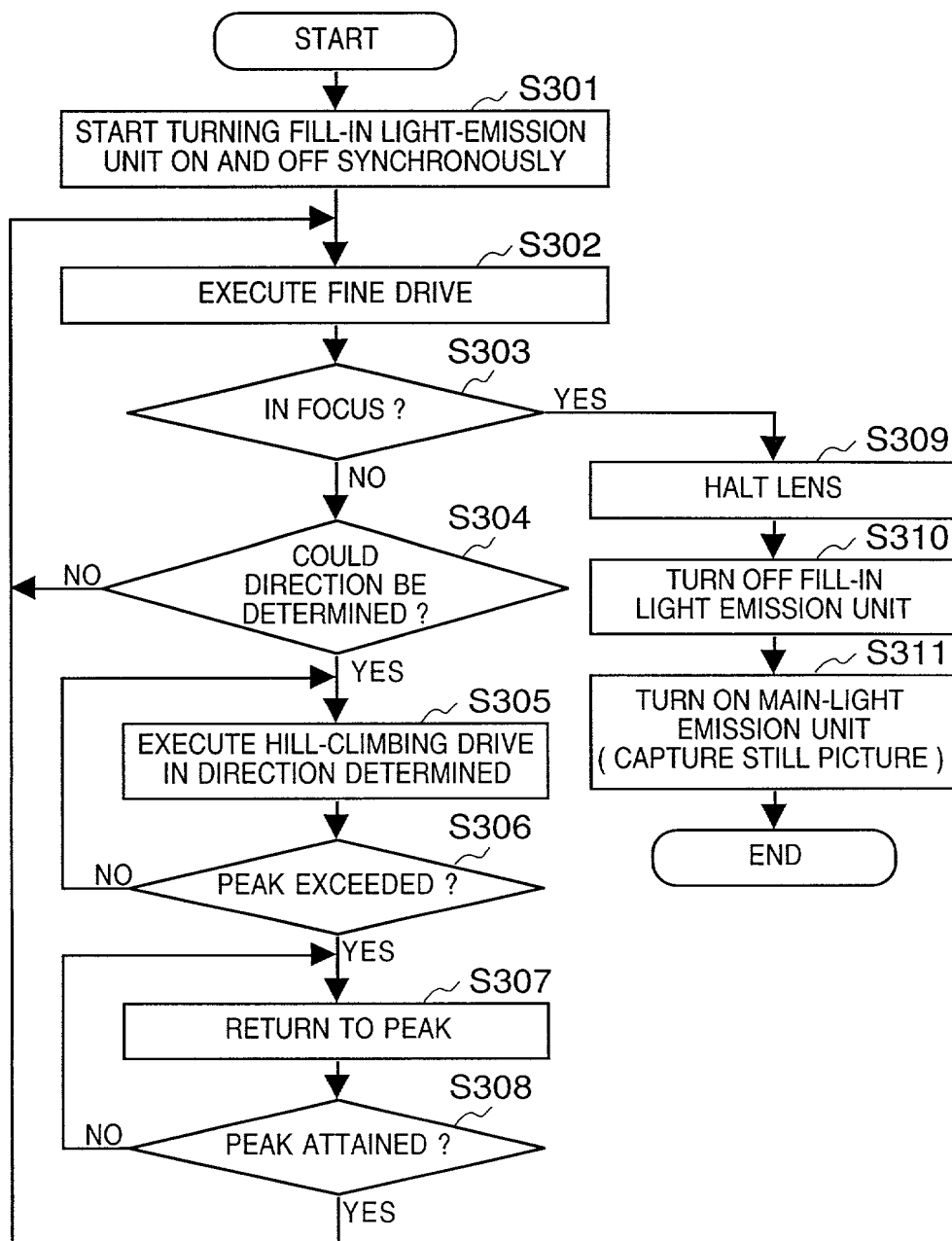


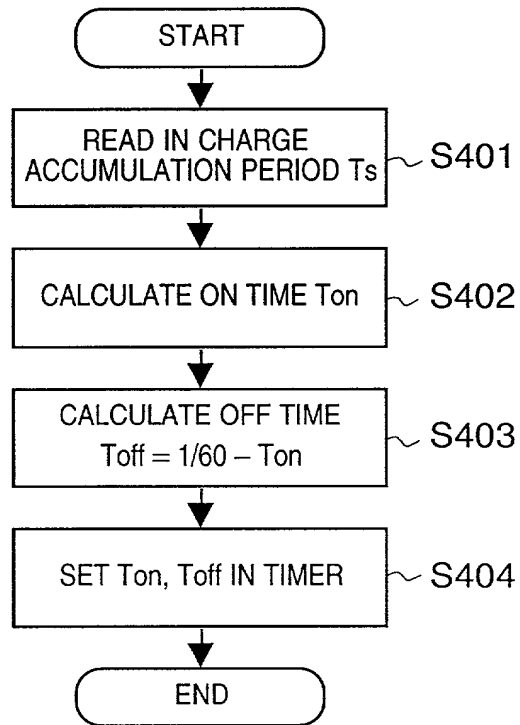
FIG. 4

FIG. 5

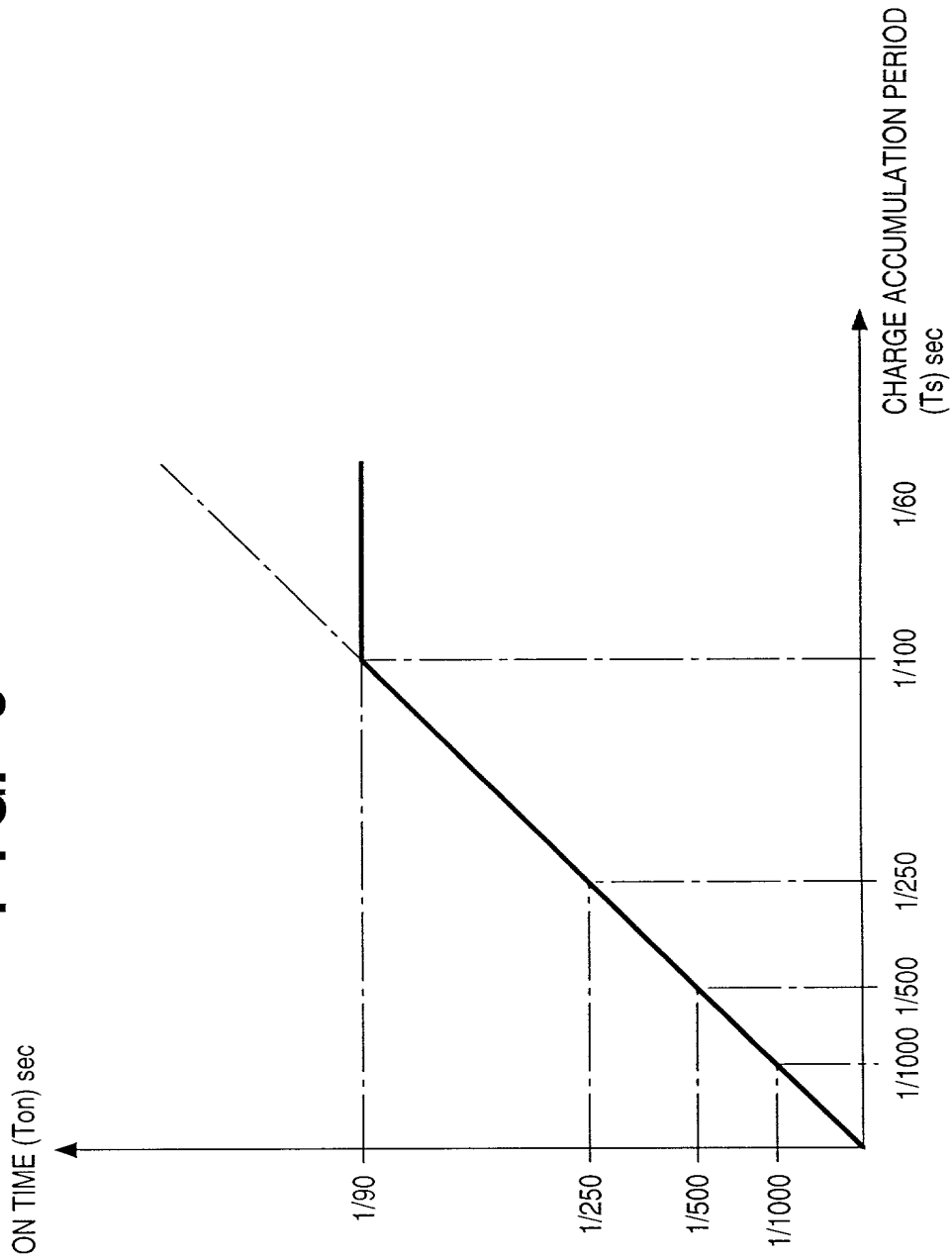


FIG. 6

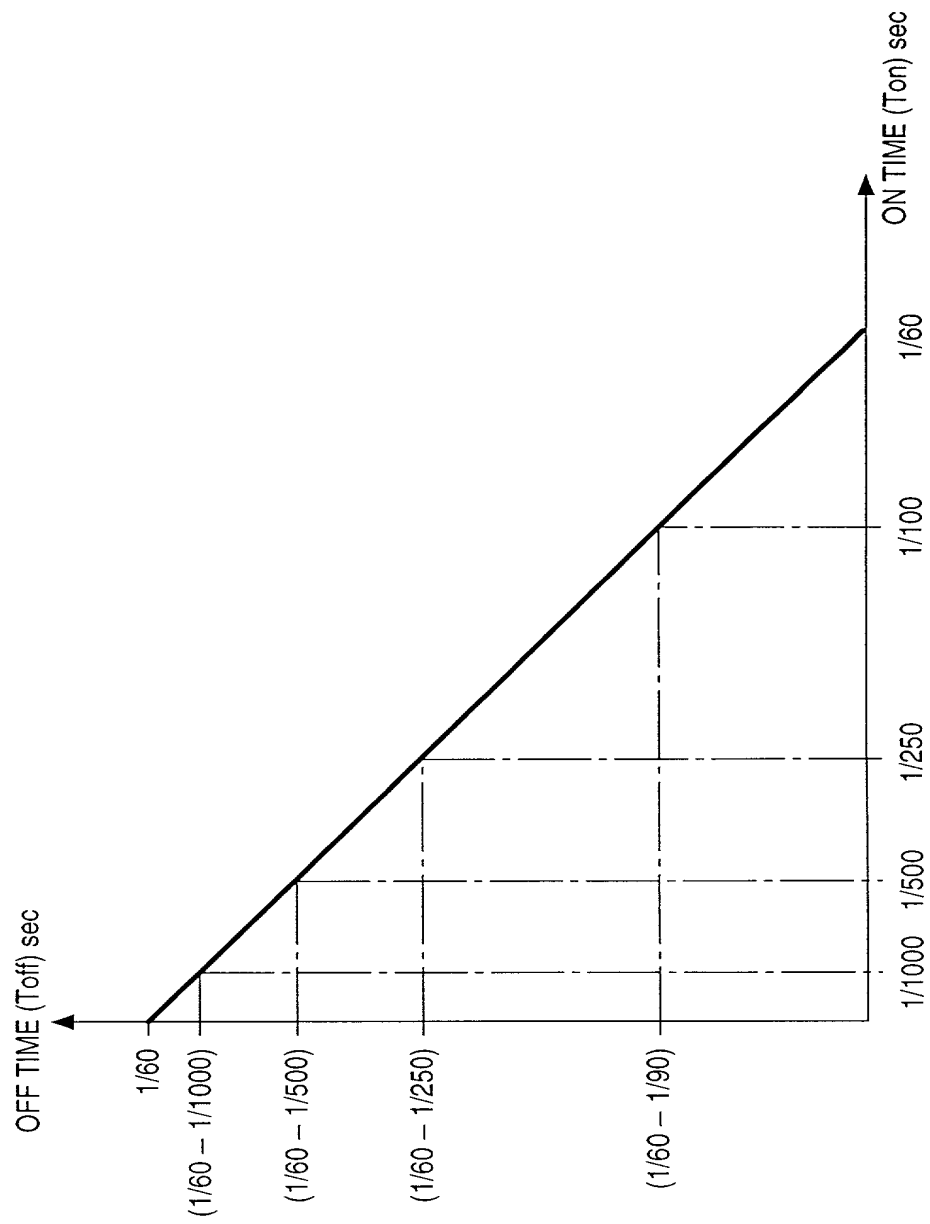


FIG. 7 is a timing diagram showing the relationship between the CCD signal quantity, the fill-in-light control signal, and the vertical synchronizing signal. The diagram illustrates the sequence of events during a video frame, including the read-out period and the fill-in-light period.

FIG. 7

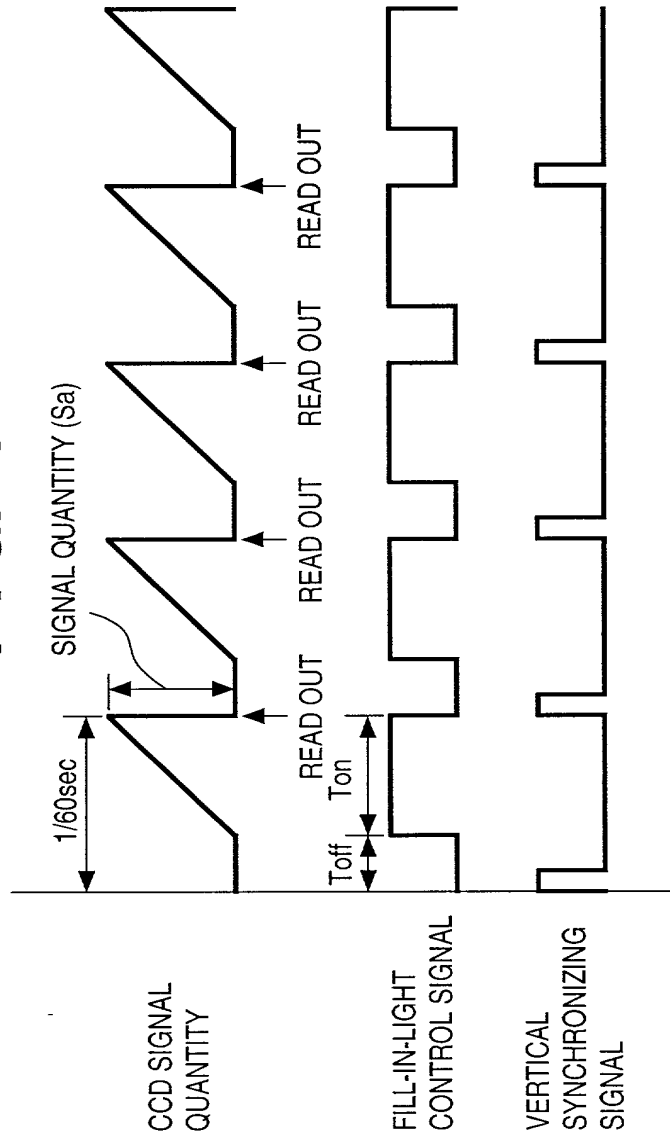


FIG. 8 is a schematic diagram of a vertical synchronizing signal generator. The diagram shows a series of four sawtooth waveforms representing the signal quantity (Sb) over time. The first waveform is labeled "READ OUT" and the second is labeled "READ OUT READ OUT READ OUT". The third waveform is labeled "READ OUT" and the fourth is labeled "READ OUT". The signal quantity (Sb) is indicated by a vertical arrow between the first and second waveforms. The signal quantity (Sb_avr) is indicated by a vertical arrow between the third and fourth waveforms. The time intervals Ton and Toff are indicated by horizontal arrows between the first and second waveforms, and between the third and fourth waveforms, respectively. The vertical synchronizing signal is shown as a series of pulses at the bottom of the diagram.

FIG. 8

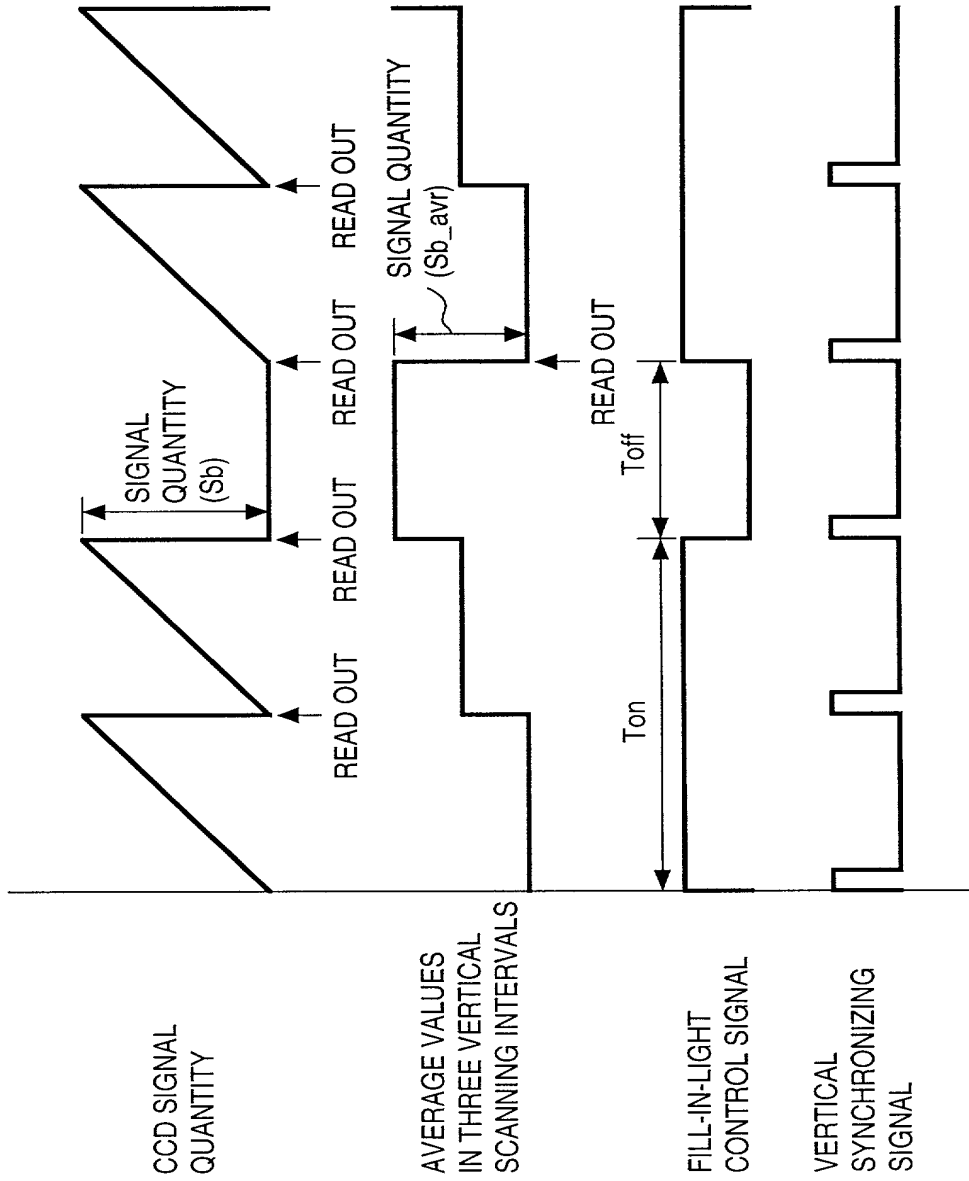


FIG. 9 is a timing diagram showing the relationship between the CCD signal quantity, the fill-in-light control signal, and the vertical synchronizing signal. The diagram illustrates the sequence of events during a video frame, including the signal quantity ramp, the readout process, and the control signals for the fill-in-light and vertical synchronization.

FIG. 9

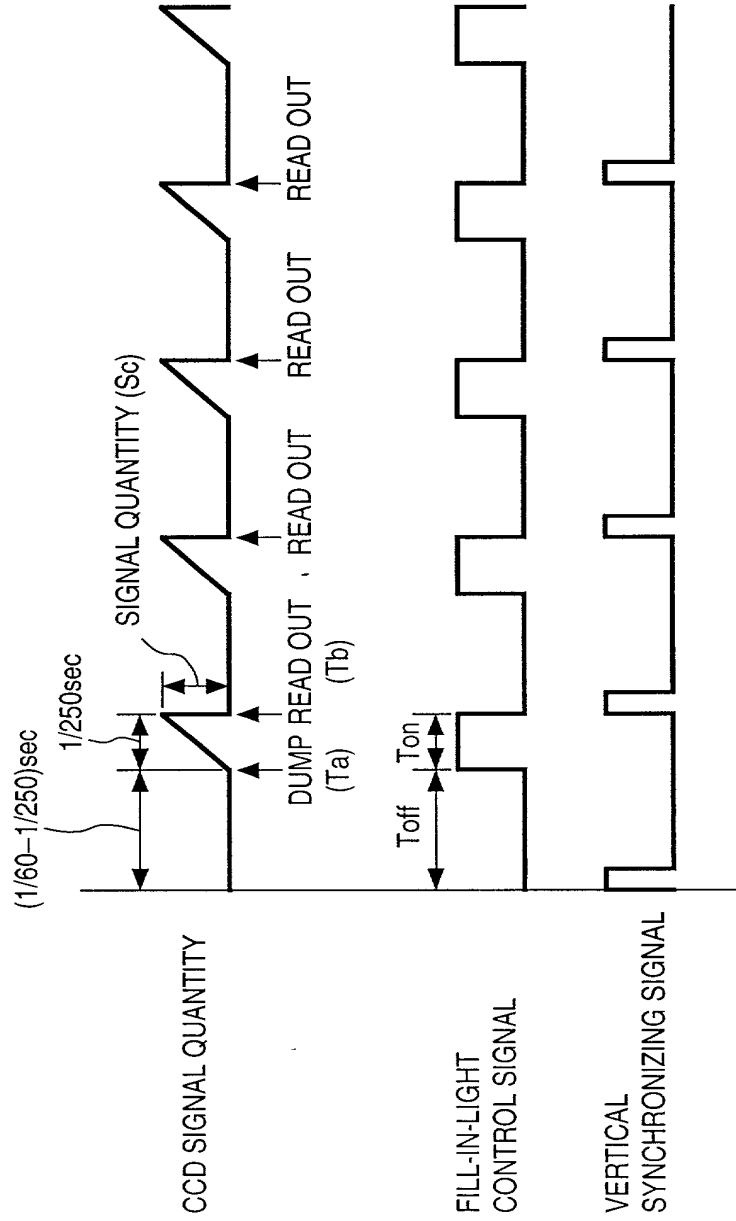


FIG. 10 is a timing diagram showing the relationship between the CCD signal quantity, the average values in three vertical scanning intervals, the fill-in-light control signal, and the vertical synchronizing signal.

FIG. 10

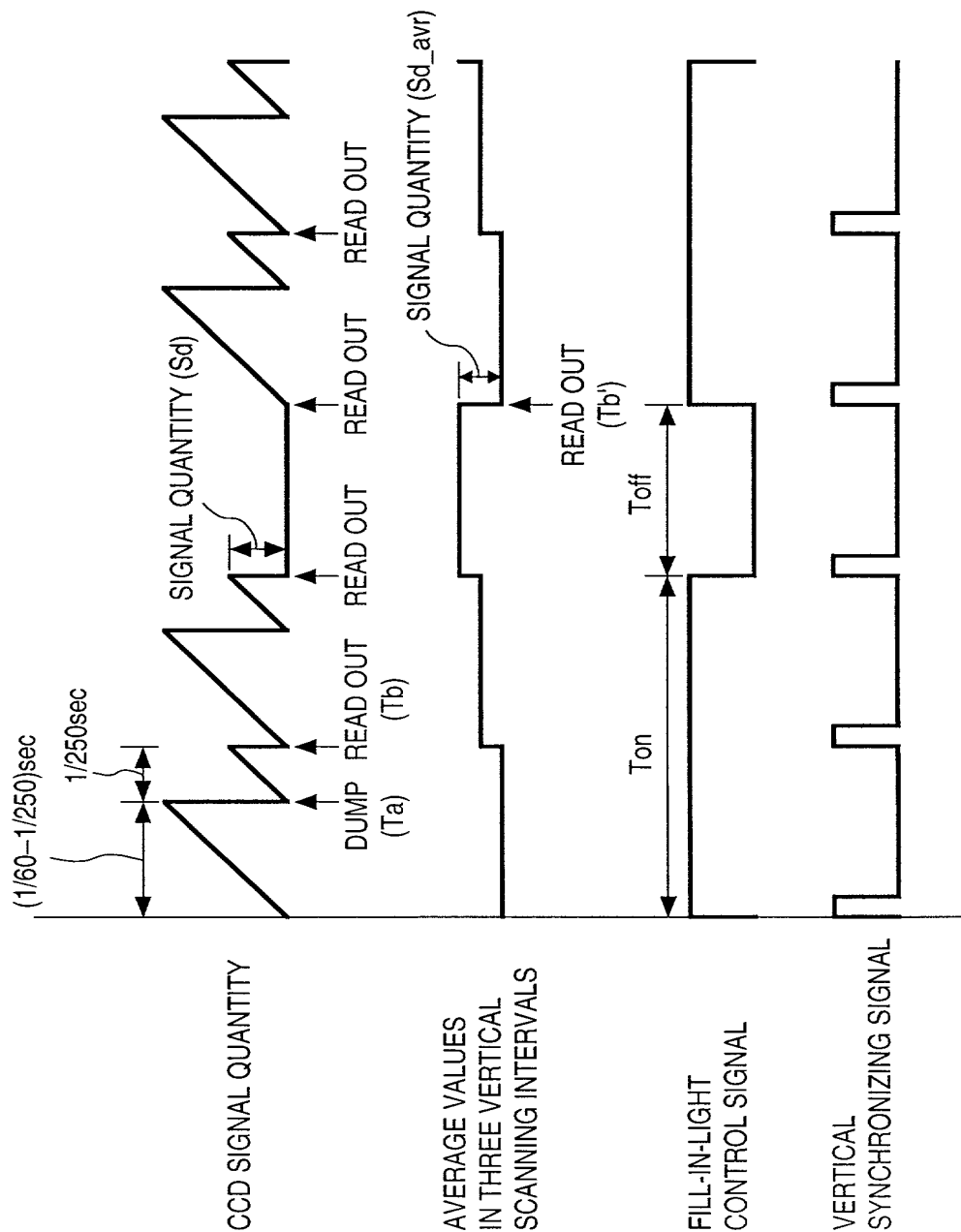


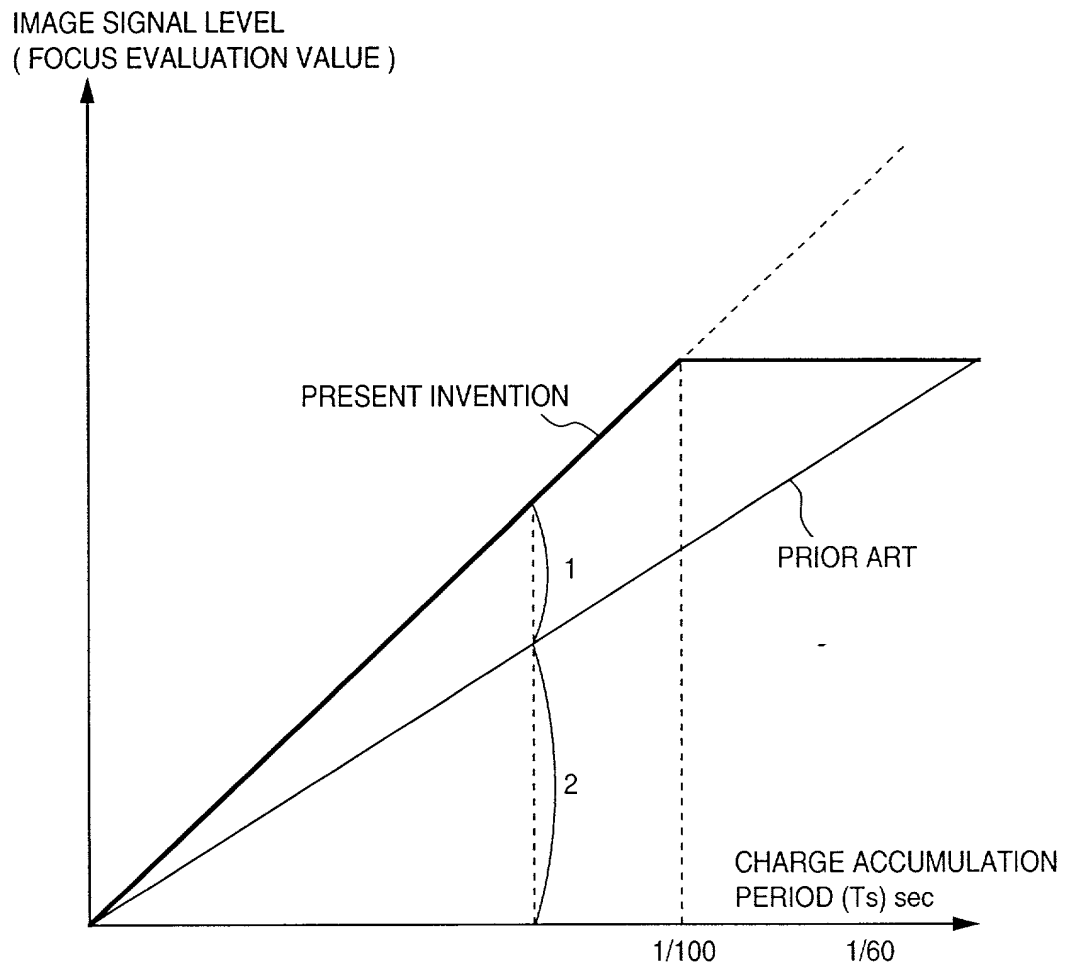
FIG. 11

FIG. 12

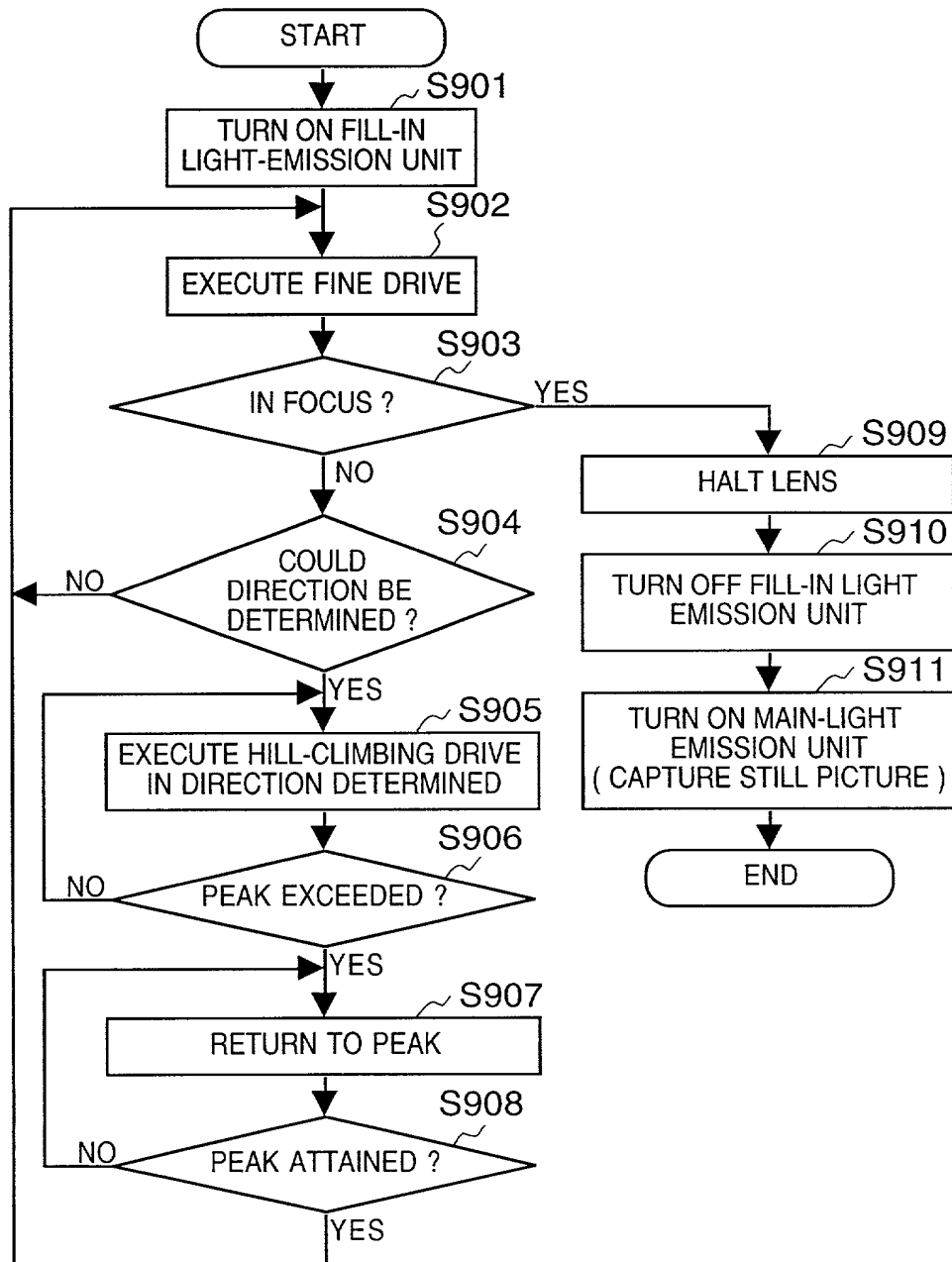


FIG. 13

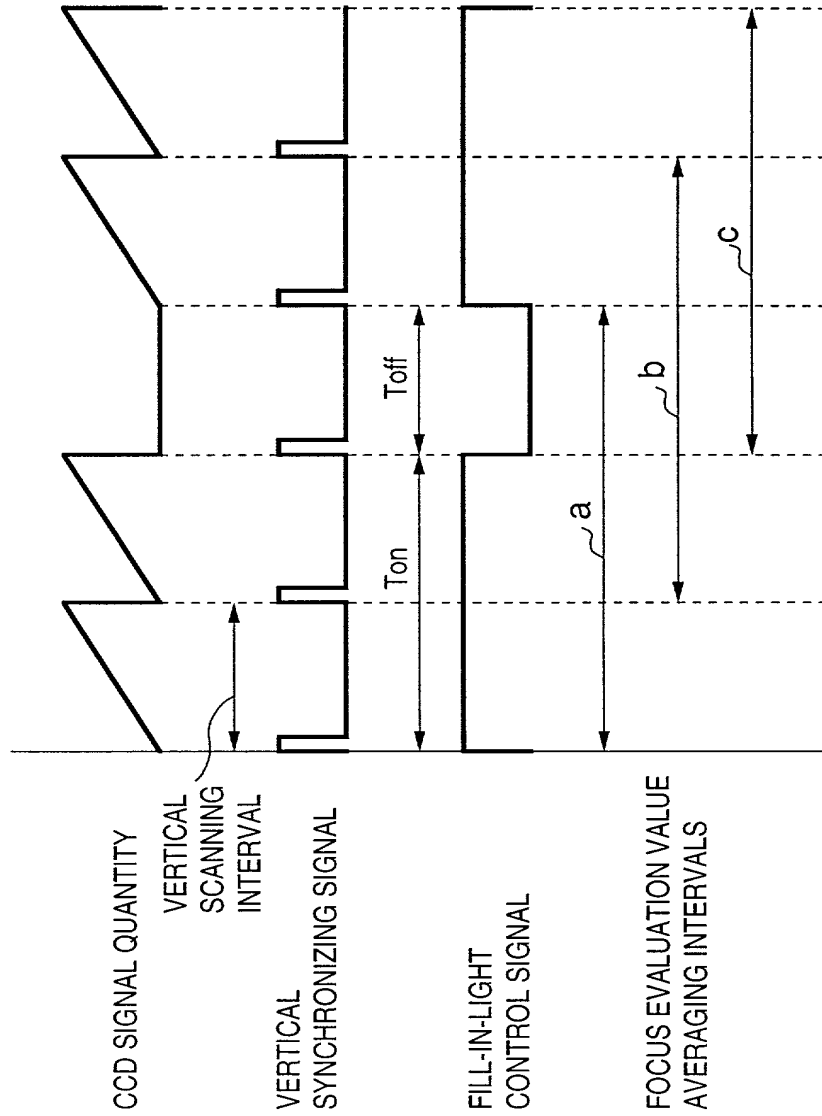


FIG. 14

